



NEWS RELEASE

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Fewer, Briefer Wiretaps More Successful in Fighting Crime in 2000

Federal and state courts received and authorized fewer applications for wiretap orders in 2000, and the resulting surveillance did not last as long on average as the previous year. But a larger percentage of wiretap interceptions yielded incriminating evidence, and a greater percentage of arrested persons ended up convicted.

The number of wiretaps authorized by the nation's courts last year was 1,190, according to the *2000 Wiretap Report*, a Report of the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts on Applications and Orders Authorizing or Approving the Interception of Wire, Oral or Electronic Communications. Installed wiretaps were in operation an average of 42 days in 2000, a 15 percent decrease from the average duration in 1999. The average number of incriminating communications intercepted per wiretap rose by 3 percent. As of December 31, 2000, 3,411 persons were arrested as a result of authorized intercepted communications, and 736 of them were convicted. That 22 percent conviction rate in 2000 was up from the 15 percent of 1999.

During 2000, 26 jurisdictions—the federal government and 25 states—reported using wire, oral or electronic surveillance as an investigative tool. Federal judges authorized 479 wiretap applications; state judges 711. No application was rejected. Wiretap applications in New York (349), California (88), New Jersey (45), Pennsylvania (43), Florida (43) and Illinois (41) accounted for 86 percent of all authorizations approved by state judges. Those same states accounted for 84 percent of all authorizations approved by state judges in 1999.

Violations of drug laws and racketeering laws remained the two most prevalent types of offenses investigated through communications intercepts—75 percent of all applications for intercepts cited drug offenses as the most serious offense under investigation. The most active federal intercept occurred in the Northern District of Ohio, where a 60-day fraud investigation resulted in 346 interceptions per day. For state authorizations, the most active was a 35-day

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bribery investigation in New York County that produced an average of 713 intercepts per day. Nationwide, the average number of persons whose communications were intercepted per order in which wiretaps were installed was 196.

The most common method of surveillance reported was “phone wire communication,” which includes all telephones (landline, cellular, cordless and mobile). Telephone wiretaps accounted for 81 percent (927 cases) of intercepts installed in 2000; cellular or mobile telephones were involved in 691 wiretaps. The next most common method reported was the electronic wiretap, which includes digital display pagers, voice pagers, fax machines and e-mail. Electronic wiretaps accounted for 8 percent (89 cases) of all intercepts. Microphones were used in 5 percent of intercepts (52 cases), and a combination of surveillance methods was used in 6 percent (71 cases).

New to the *Wiretap Report* in 2000 is the number of wiretap applications granted for which encryption, or scrambling, was encountered. Congress amended 18 U.S.C. 2519(2)(b) to require such reporting, along with whether such encryption prevented law enforcement officials from obtaining the plain text of the intercepted communications. In 2000, encryption was reported to have been encountered in 22 wiretaps. In none of them, however, was encryption successful in preventing law enforcement officials from obtaining the plain text.

Each federal and state judge is required to file a written report with the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts on each application for an order authorizing the interception of a wire, oral or electronic communication. No report is required when an order is issued with the consent of one of the communicating parties.

A summary report on authorized intercepts is attached. The full report can be found on the Federal Judiciary’s web site at www.uscourts.gov.

Table 7
Authorized Intercepts Granted Pursuant to
18 U.S.C. 2519 as Reported in Wiretap Reports
for Calendar Years 1990 - 2000

Wiretap Report Date	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Intercept applications requested	872	856	919	976	1,154	1,058	1,150	1,186	1,331	1,350	1,190
Intercept applications authorized	872	856	919	976	1,154	1,058	1,149	1,186	1,329	1,350	1,190
Federal	324	356	340	450	554	532	581	569	566	601	479
State	548	500	579	526	600	526	568	617	763	749	711
Avg. days of original authorization	28	28	28	28	29	29	28	28	28	27	28
Number of extensions	581	601	646	825	861	834	887	1,028	1,164	1,367	924
Average length of extensions (days)	29	29	30	29	29	29	28	28	27	29	28
Location of authorized intercept*											
Personal Residence	493	439	441	410	451	428	434	382	436	341	244
Business	156	144	119	124	118	101	101	78	87	59	56
Portable device	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	719
Multiple locations	66	89	70	92	97	115	149	197	222	287	109
Not indicated or other	157	184	289	350	488	414	465	529	584	663	62
Major offense specified											
Arson, explosives, and weapons	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	3	3	8	5
Bribery	11	16	8	1	6	4	10	13	9	42	21
Extortion (includes usury and loan-sharking)	17	2	7	9	8	18	9	24	12	11	10
Gambling	116	98	66	96	86	95	114	98	93	60	49
Homicide and assault	21	21	35	28	19	30	41	31	55	62	72
Larceny and theft	51	17	16	13	18	12	7	22	19	9	15
Narcotics	520	536	634	679	876	732	821	870	955	978	894
Robbery and burglary	6	2	-	-	6	5	4	5	4	4	4
Other or unspecified	40	50	63	48	47	60	38	27	28	37	44
Racketeering	90	114	90	101	88	98	105	93	153	139	76
Intercept applications installed**	812	802	846	938	1,100	1,024	1,035	1,094	1,245	1,277	1,139
Federal	321	349	332	444	549	527	574	563	562	595	472
State	491	453	514	494	551	497	461	531	683	682	667
For intercepts installed											
Total days in operation	28,782	30,002	32,430	39,819	44,500	43,179	43,635	48,871	53,411	63,243	47,729
Avg. number of persons intercepted***	131	121	117	100	84	140	192	197	190	195	196
Average number of intercepted communications***	1,487	1,584	1,861	1,801	2,139	2,028	1,969	2,081	1,858	1,921	1,769
Average number of incriminating intercepted communications***	321	290	347	364	373	459	422	418	350	390	402
Authorizations for which costs reported	794	775	829	912	1,042	983	1,007	1,029	1,184	1,232	1,080
Average cost of intercepts for which costs reported (in dollars)	45,125	45,033	46,492	57,256	49,478	56,454	61,436	61,176	57,669	57,511	54,829
Intercept applications authorized, but reported after publication****	50	85	47	206	46	81	48	90	114	171	-
Total authorized, by year (reported through December 2000)	922	941	966	1,182	1,200	1,139	1,197	1,276	1,443	1,521	1,190

* Starting in 2000, location categories were revised to improve reporting and reduce the number of instances "other" location was reported.

** Installed intercepts include only those intercepts for which reports were received from prosecuting officials.

*** As of 1998, the average excludes those reports in which the number of persons intercepted, the number of intercepts, or the number of incriminating intercepts was not reported or could not be determined.

**** Some wiretaps terminated in a given year are not reported until a subsequent year because they are part of ongoing investigations.